

Sanskrit and the British Empire

Rajesh Kochhar

SANSKRIT AND THE BRITISH EMPIRE

This book focuses on the career of Sanskrit in British India. Europe's discovery of Sanskrit was a development of far-reaching historical significance in terms of intellectual curiosity, evangelical considerations, colonial administrative requirements, and political compulsions. The volume critically analyses this interplay between Sanskrit texts and the imperial and colonial presence in India. It goes beyond the question of what the discovery of Sanskrit meant for the West and examines what this collocation meant for India.

The author looks at how the British needed Sanskrit for dispensation of Hindu civil law; how learned Pandits were cultivated; and how scholarship was developed transcending utilitarianism. He also studies the extent to which Sanskrit in pre- and non-British India had a bearing on Europe and explores themes such as Jesuit Sanskrit, Hinduism in practice, scripturism, Aryan Race Theory, seductive orientalism, and the introduction of archivalism in India.

Rich in archival sources, this unique book will be useful for scholars and researchers of colonial history, modern Indian history, Indology, linguistics, history of education, Sanskrit studies, post-colonial studies, and cultural studies.

Rajesh Kochhar is a former Professor of Astrophysics, and former Director, National Institute of Science, Technology and Development Studies, New Delhi, India. He is a former President of International Astronomical Union Commission on History of Astronomy. He has been a Fulbright Visiting Lecturer, Jawaharlal Nehru Fellow, and British Council Visiting Scholar at University of Cambridge, UK. He is the recipient of Indian National Science Academy's 2014 Indira Gandhi Prize for Popularization of Science. He has published original research in a number of fields and lectured extensively in India and abroad including Harvard, Cornell, University of Texas at Austin, Belfast, Brighton, Royal Dublin Society, Tubingen, Copenhagen University and National Museum Copenhagen. He is the author of *The Vedic People: Their History and Geography* (2000) and *English Education in India, 1715–1835: Half-caste, Missionary, and Secular Stages* (2020).



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NOTE ON TRANSLITERATION

Sanskrit words have been written in the Roman script by adding diacritical marks according to the International Alphabet of Sanskrit Transliteration (IAST). However, to make Sanskrit words intelligible to non-experts and to decrease the distance between scholarly Sanskrit and popular Sanskrit, commonly understood *sh*, *ch*, and *chh* have been used in place of the recommended *s*, *c*, and *ch*. Thus, *Viśeṣa* is written as *Viśheṣha* and *Candra* as *Chandra*. Also, in case of compound words (Samāsa), constituents are separated by dots for ease of reading and comprehension; thus *Pañcha.tattva.prakāśha*.

MAJOR LANDMARKS IN SANSKRIT STUDIES, 1544–1951

(Buddhist and Jain texts are not included.)

1544	St Francis Xavier (1506–1552) in a letter from Goa describes Sanskrit as equivalent to Latin; quotes <i>Om Shri Narayana namah</i> and translates it into Latin.
1583	An English Jesuit Fr Thomas Stephens (1549–1619) in Goa writes to England that the structure of ‘many languages of these places’ was allied to Greek and Latin. (He prepared a Konkani grammar in Portuguese which would be printed in 1640.)
1586	A scion of a long-established Florentine mercantile family, the University-educated Filippo Sassetti (1544–1588) in a letter draws attention to similarity between Sanskrit and Italian numerals.
>1606	Jesuit Fr Roberto de Nobili (1577–1655) in Madurai, South India, nominally becomes the first European to learn Sanskrit.
1630	English chaplain Henry Lord at Surat publishes <i>A display of two forraigne sects in the East Indies vizt: the sect of the Banians the ancient natives of India and the sect of the Persees the ancient inhabitants of Persia together with the religion and manners of each sect</i> . It quotes excerpts from the Avesta and refers to the Hindu Shaster in the singular.

1651	Dutch chaplain Abraham Roger's (d. 1649) posthumous memoir <i>De Open-Deure</i> translates some of the Sanskrit aphorisms of poet Bhartrhari (5th–6th century CE) from a Portuguese version. First European glimpse of Sanskrit literature.
1660–1662	German Jesuit Fr Heinrich Roth (1620–1668) in Agra prepares a Sanskrit grammar based on Anubhuti Svarupacharya's work <i>Sārasvata.prakriyā</i> . Instrumental in introducing Devanagari script to Europe.
<1732	German Jesuit Fr Johann Ernst Hanxleden (1681–1732), working in Kerala, prepares a Sanskrit–Malayalam–Portuguese dictionary and Sanskrit grammar <i>Grammatica Grandonica</i> (see 1790 below).
1729–1735	French Jesuit Fr Jean Calmette (1692/3–1740) in Pondicherry and Fr Jean Francois Pons (1698–1752) in Chandernagor send a total of 287 volumes (including multiple copies) to the Paris Library, including three Vedas, excluding Atharvaveda. In 1732, Pons sends a grammar composed by him along with the manuscripts.
1743	Pons publishes very accurate description of the various branches of Sanskrit literature including the four Vedas and the six systems of philosophy, published in <i>Lettres edifiantes et curieuses</i> (Edifying and Curious Letters). He mentions the grammarian Panini and notes the Greek origin of astronomical terms like hora and kendra.
1760–1782	Voltaire presented with a copy of the so-called <i>Ezourvedam</i> (1760); published in French (1778); translated into German (1779); shown to be a forgery (1782).
1767	South India-based Jesuit Fr Gaston-Laurent Coeurdoux becomes the first person to suggest, on the basis of concrete philological evidence, the similarity of Sanskrit to Greek and Latin, and a common origin for them. Work however was published only in 1808.

x Major landmarks in Sanskrit studies, 1544–1951

1771	Abraham Hyacinthe Anquetil-Duperron (1732–1805) publishes his translation of Avesta.
1774	Lord Monboddo in the second volume of his <i>Origin and Progress of Languages</i> mentions a possible affinity between Sanskrit and Greek. The starting point for his argument was the Pons 1743 letter.
1776	Beginning of British colonial interest in Sanskrit for reasons of dispensation of justice. A compilation <i>Vivādarṇava. setu</i> culled from old texts by Pandits in Calcutta. Rendered into English through the intermediaries of Bengali and Persian by Nathaniel Brassey Halhed (1751–1830) under the title <i>A Code of Gentoo Laws or Ordinances of the Pundits</i> . Published from London. Translated into French and German in 1778.
1778	Halhed publishes a Bengali grammar.
1781	Charles Wilkins (1749–1836) translates a 9th century CE copper plate Sanskrit inscription from Munghyr. Beginning of Indian epigraphy.
1784	Asiatick Society Calcutta formed, under the patronage of the Governor General, with William Jones (1746–1794) as President.
1785	Wilkins in India translates a Sanskrit stone inscription from Buddal.
1785	Wilkins' translation of <i>Bhagavadgītā</i> published from London. First translation of a Sanskrit work directly into English. Translated into French in 1787 and German in 1802.
1786	Jones proclaims the 'discovery' of similarities among Greek, Latin, and Sanskrit from the Asiatick Society forum.
1787	Wilkins publishes translation of <i>Hitopadesha</i> .
1788	Foucher d'Obsonville (1734–1802) publishes from Paris the French translation of Bhagavat Purāṇa [<i>Baḡavadam</i>] which had been rendered from Sanskrit into Tamil by Meridas Poulle (Pillai) at Pondicherry in 1769. Europe's introduction to a Purāṇa.

1789	The first volume of <i>Asiatick Researches</i> published from Calcutta. Printed date on the volume is 1788.
1789	Jones publishes <i>Sacontala</i> , his translation of Kalidasa's <i>Shakuntala</i> .
1790	Paulinus a Sancto Bartholomaeo [real name Filip Ivan Vesdin] (1748–1806) publishes Hanxleden's grammar as his own, calling it <i>Sidharubam</i> [Siddha. rūpam] after the Sanskrit original. First grammar of Sanskrit ever published.
1791	Georg Foster (1754–1794) translates Jones' <i>Sacontala</i> into German with notes and a voluminous lexicon, initiating German interest in Indian literature and philosophy; second edition in 1803.
1791	Sanskrit College Benares established for Brahmin boys and with Brahmin faculty, with support from Raja of Benares.
1792	Jones publishes his translation of Jayadeva's <i>Gītā Govinda</i> .
1794	Jones publishes translation of <i>Manu.smyti</i> as <i>Institutes of Hindu Law</i> .
1795	William Jones publishes an alphabetical catalogue of 419 Indian plants giving 'their Sanskrit and as many of their Linnaean names as could with any degree of precision be ascertained'.
1795	Wilkins publishes translation of the Shakuntala and Dushyanta episode of the Mahabharata.
1798	Henry Thomas Colebrooke (1765–1837) publishes in four volumes <i>A Digest of Hindu Law on Contracts and Succession</i> as translation of the celebrated Jagannath Tarkapanchanan's (1704–1807) Sanskrit compilation titled <i>Vivāda.bhaṅg.arnav</i> .
1800–1854	Fort William College Calcutta established for training of civil servants, with European professors and Indian moonshees. Equipped with a splendid library.
1801	East India Company sets up a library and manuscript repository in London under Wilkins.

xii Major landmarks in Sanskrit studies, 1544–1951

1801–1802	Anquetil-Duperron publishes <i>Oupenek'hat</i> , the Latin translation of 50 Upanishads not from the original Sanskrit but from the 17th century Persian rendering.
1803	Bengal–returned Alexander Hamilton (1762–1824) teaches preliminary Sanskrit in Paris; pupils include Friedrich Schlegel (1772–1829).
1804	Paulinus brings out a simpler version of Sidhrubam, calling it simply Vyacaranam.
1805	Colebrooke publishes the first (and only) volume of his grammar based on Panini from Calcutta. First Sanskrit grammar published from India.
1806	East India Company College opened at Hartford Castle near London for education of youth selected for service in India. Retrospectively known after Haileybury where the College moved in 1809.
1806	William Carey publishes his Sanskrit grammar based on Bopadeva from Serampore.
1806–1810	William Carey and Joshua Marshman publish the original Sanskrit text and prose translation of (one third of) Valmiki's Ramayana in four parts. This was the first translation of the Ramayana into a European language.
1807	Hamilton appointed Sanskrit professor at East India Company College for teaching to prospective civil servants; first Sanskrit position outside India.
1808	Wilkins publishes a student–friendly Sanskrit grammar from London, for use at Haileybury College.
1808	Friedrich Schlegel publishes in German his <i>On the Language and Wisdom of the Indians</i> .
1810	Colebrooke publishes <i>Dāya.bhāga and Mitākshara: Two Treatises on the Hindu Law of Inheritance</i> .
1810	Henry Pitts Forster (c. 1766–1815) publishes his Sanskrit grammar from Calcutta.

1810	The Danish-French geographer Conrad Malte Brun (1775–1826) coins the term Indo-Germanic for the over-arching language family.
1813	Politically neutral term Indo-European coined by the English physicist and Egyptologist Thomas Young (1773–1829).
1815	Antoine-Léonard de Chézy (1773–1832) appointed first Sanskrit professor in France and continental Europe, at College de France.
1816	Franz Bopp (1791–1867) publishes his epochal work with the translated title <i>On the system of Conjugation in Sanskrit</i> . Beginning of comparative grammar.
1817	Colebrooke publishes his 376-page <i>Algebra, with Arithmetic and Mensuration, from the Sanscrit of Brahme Gupta and Bhascara</i> .
1818	August Wilhelm Schlegel (1767–1845) appointed the first Sanskrit professor in Germany at University of Bonn.
1819	Friedrich Schlegel uses the term Aryan in the racial sense to denote Indo-Germanic or Indo-European speakers.
1819	Colebrooke gifts his 2000-strong manuscript collection to the East India Company library.
1819	Horace Hayman Wilson (1786–1860) publishes <i>A Dictionary in Sanscrit and English</i> , translated, amended, and enlarged from an original compilation, prepared by learned Natives for the College of Fort William.
1820	William Yates (1792–1845) publishes from Serampore <i>A Grammar of the Sanscrit Language: On a New Plan</i> .
1820–1822	Rasmus Kristian Rask (1787–1832) visits India, stays mostly in Bombay, and collects Zoroastrian manuscripts.
1821	Sanskrit College Poona established out of Dakshina Fund and on the lines of Benares Sanskrit College.
1822	Societe' Asiatique formed in Paris.
1823	Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland formed in London.

1823	August Wilhelm Schlegel translates <i>Bhagavad Gītā</i> into Latin.
1824	Sanskrit College Calcutta established as part of public instruction.
1828	Royal Asiatic Society establishes Oriental Translation Fund through subscription; augmented by a 100 guinea annual grant from the Company.
1828	Friedrich August Rosen (1805–1837) appointed professor of Sanskrit at the newly opened London University.
1830	Rosen publishes his 27-page Rig-vedæ Specimen, consisting of seven short hymns, giving the original text, along with translation and explanatory notes.
1832	H. H. Wilson appointed first Boden professor of Sanskrit at Oxford University.
1833	Reverend John Stevenson (1798–1858) publishes from Bombay <i>Trividya Triguṇāmikā</i> [The Threefold Science], Sukta 1–35 of the first mandala of the R̥gveda with Sanskrit notes.
1834	August Wilhelm Schlegel proposes in his <i>Origin of the Hindoos</i> that the Indian ‘nation’ was made up of two ‘distinct races’: ‘the black savages’ and the Indo-European speaking ‘white race’.
1838	Rosen’s <i>R̥gveda-Sanhita: liber primus: Sanskritè et Latine</i> comprising 121 of a total of 1028 hymns published posthumously. First translation of R̥gvedic hymns.
1840–1847	Eugène Burnouf (1801–1852) publishes the Sanskrit text and French translation of the Bhagavata Purāṇa in three volumes.
1841	Yale College in USA appoints France- and Germany-trained Edward Elbridge Salisbury (1814–1901) as (unsalaried) professor of Arabic and Sanskrit, ‘the first appointment in graduate education outside the fields of law, divinity, and medicine’.
1842–1853	Royal Berlin Library purchases Robert Chambers’ (1737–1803) collection. Catalogue published by Albrecht Weber (1825–1901) in 1853.

1843	Stevenson publishes his translation of the Sanhitá of the Sámaveda from London.
1846	Roth publishes in German On the literature and history of the Veda.
1847	Christian Lassen (1800–1876) publishes the first volume of his four-volume <i>Indische Altertumskunde</i> [Indian Antiquities] emphasizing Aryan racism.
1847	Friedrich Max Müller (1823–1900) uses the term Aryan brethren to jointly refer to Europeans and upper-caste Hindus.
1848	Theodor Benfey (1809–1881) translates into German <i>Hymns of Sāma Veda</i> .
1849	Benares-based James Robert Ballantyne (1813–1864) brings out an English version of Varadaraja's Sanskrit grammar <i>Laghu Kaumudi</i> .
1849–1872	Max Müller publishes in six volumes his translation of the Rigveda with Sayana's commentary. The project was funded by the East India Company and after it by the English Crown.
1851	Isvarchandra Vidyasagar (1820–1891) publishes an easy-to-use <i>Introduction to Sanskrit Grammar in Bengali</i> , facilitating Sanskrit learning. Translated into other languages including English.
1852–1855	French aristocrat and royalist Arthur de Gobineau (1816–1882) publishes <i>Essay on the Inequality Of Human Races</i> , talking of racial purity, and attributing superiority to the Aryan race.
1854	Germany-trained William Dwight Whitney (1827–1894) appointed USA's first full-time professor of Sanskrit, at Yale College, on voluntary retirement of Salisbury.
1855–1875	Saint Petersburg Dictionary, in seven volumes, by Otto von Böhtlingk(1815–1904) and Rudolph Roth (1821–1895).
1856–1857	Roth and Whitney edit the Sanskrit text of Atharvaveda.
1859–1864	Simon Theodor Aufrecht (1822–1907) catalogues Sanskrit manuscripts at the Bodleian Library, Oxford.

1862–1875	Aufrecht serves as Edinburgh University's first Sanskrit professor.
1869	Viceroy sanctions a project for acquisition of old manuscripts through copying or purchase. Duplicates presented to European and American libraries.
1879–1904	Many Sanskrit texts translated by various authors under the series <i>Sacred Books of the East</i> (SBE 1-50) with Max Müller as the general editor.
1878–1880	Arthur Coke Burnell (1840–1882) publishes A classified index to the Sanskrit mss. in the Saraswati Palace library at Tanjore in three parts. It noticed 12376 manuscripts, but was still incomplete. Printed in London
1879–1882	George Bühler (1837–1898): <i>The Sacred Laws of the Āryas</i> (SBE 2, 14)
1879–1884	Max Muller: <i>Upanishads</i> (SBE 1, 15)
1880	Julius Jolly (1849–1932): <i>Institutes of Vishnu</i> (SBE 7)
1882	Kashinath Trimbak Telang (1850–1893): <i>Bhagavadgītā</i> (SBE 8)
1882–1900	Julius Eggeling (1842–1918): <i>Shatapatha Brāhmaṇa</i> SBE 12, 26, 41, 43, 44)
1883–1896	Kisari Mohan Ganguli publishes the first ever translation of the Mahabharata in prose.
1886	Adyar Library and Research Centre, Madras, founded by the Theosophist Henry Steel Olcott (1832–1907).
1886	Bühler: <i>Laws of Manu</i> (SBE 25).
1886–1892	Herman Oldenberg (1854–1920): <i>Grihya Sūtra</i> (SBE 29,30).
1889	Jolly: <i>Minor law-books: Nārada. Brihaspati</i> (SBE 33).
1890–1892	Max Müller brings out four-volume second edition of the Rigveda, with financial support from Maharaja of Vijayanagara.
1890–1896	George Thibaut (1848–1914): <i>Vedānta Sūtra</i> (SBE 34, 38).
1891	Max Müller: <i>Vedic Hymns I</i> (SBE 32).

1891	Oriental Library established in Mysore by the King; renamed Oriental Research Institute in 1943.
1897	Maurice Bloomfield (1855–1928): Hymns of Atharvaveda (SBE 42).
1897	Oldenberg: Vedic Hymns II (SBE 46).
1901	Sanskrit plays of Bhasa, who preceded Kalidasa, discovered near Trivandrum by Taruvāgrahārām Ganapati Shastri (1860–1926).
1904	Atharva-Veda Samhita; translated by Whitney; revised and edited by Charles Rockwell Lanman (1850–1941).
1905–1915	Rudrapatna Shama Shastri (1868–1944) discovers manuscript of Kautilya's Arthaśhāstra in Mysore Library, publishes Sanskrit text in 1909, and English translation in 1915. Translated into various European languages.
1917	Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute established at Poona in honour of Ramchandra Gopal Bhandarkar (1837–1925).
1918	Centuries-old Royal Sarasvati Mahal Library Tanjore becomes a public institution.
1951	Karl Friedrich Geldner's (1852–1929) three-volume authoritative rendition of the Rigveda into German published.